

BEFORE YOU BUILD or REMODEL



A Guide for Home Buyers and Remodelers

*Building Safety is
No Accident*

National Building Safety Week

BEFORE YOU BUY OR REMODEL

Your home is probably the single largest investment of your life. This checklist has been created from the **Indiana One & Two Family Dwelling Code (1985)** to assist you in performing a fundamental inspection of a home prior to remodeling or buying. Indiana's building codes are laws enacted to provide fire and life safety for you and your neighbors. Your friends in the building industry—designers, suppliers, contractors, real estate agents, regulators—have cooperated in presenting this brochure out of a desire for public awareness and safety. The points listed below are only a small sample; for fuller understanding and compliance, you will want to consult your local building or fire official for assistance.

Important Note: Before altering a building, find out from your building official what local permit requirements will affect what you can do yourself and what must be performed by a licensed professional.

CHANGE OF USE

1. **Before buying a house with the intent of changing its use, be sure to check:** (1) local zoning restrictions, and (2) Indiana building codes. The State of Indiana does not permit a residence to be altered unless it meets all the code requirements for its **new** use. For example, a home converted to an office would have to meet the same code requirements as that of a new office building.

There are five exceptions to this requirement for minor accessory uses in one room, not exceeding 500 sq. ft. in a single family residence: (1) sales, (2) offices, (3) craft/hobby shops, (4) storage and sales if no hazardous materials are involved, (5) classrooms for less than 20, used not more than 12 hours per week or 4 hours per day.

2. **Changing a residence into rental rooms or apartments:** Indiana has specific restrictions on the number of families or individuals that can inhabit a dwelling for sanitary and fire safety reasons. Check the code to prevent possible legal liability.
3. **Basement and attic rooms:** If either of these areas are to be used for living or sleeping, the code requires a certain amount of window area. Direct access to the exterior is required for all basement rooms. Local officials can provide specifics.

FOUNDATIONS

Ask your **builder** or **real estate agent** to point out:

1. New homes and additions

- residences in Indiana must have footings that extend as much as 3 feet below grade.
- the ground surface of crawl spaces must slope toward the access hole and must have a sump pump pit installed at the time of construction.
- columns in basements or crawl spaces must be protected against corrosion or decay. Crawl spaces must have ventilators within 3 feet of each corner. Unprotected wood joists must be at least 18" above the ground surface of a crawl space.

2. Existing homes

- stairstep cracks in blocks = possible sign of settling around footings.
- watermarks on basements walls = possible sign of improper drainage or malfunctioning gutter systems.
- poorly operating or stuck windows = possible sign of settling or decaying foundations.
- crumbling foundation walls = possible sign of low-grade concrete or poor drainage causing subsoil problems.
- musty smells in basement or crawl space = possible sign of poor ventilation.

FLOORS, CEILINGS & WALLS

1. **Ceiling or floor joists:** Never cut or notch joists anywhere in the middle third of the joist span or bore holes larger than 1/3 of the joist depth.
2. **Requirements for fire resistive construction,** firestops, firewall penetration, distances to chimneys/fireplaces/stoves, and other construction factors are critical for fire safety. Be certain to consult with your contractor, fire or building official when adding or changing any of these.

ROOF

1. **Re-Application of roofing shingles:** To maintain the structural integrity of your roof under snow conditions, the code restricts the number of re-applications of shingles based upon the roof slope. Your roofing supplier or contractor can advise you.
2. **Design:** There are a number of code requirements that protect the structural integrity of the roof; consult the code before adding, altering or building a new roof.

GARAGES

1. **Garage and house separation:** When adding a garage be sure the garage-side wall is covered with 1/2" gyp-

sum wallboard or its equivalent. If the garage does not have a ceiling, then the attic of the house must be separated from the garage. Also, garage doors should never open into sleeping areas.

2. **Footings and foundations:** Both are required for all accessory structures in excess of 120 square feet. Check with your local official for specific requirements.
3. **Floor construction:** Garage floor must slope toward the vehicle entry way or must drain into an approved drain.
4. **Pilot lights, switches, electrical outlets, and motors:** Must be at least 18" above the garage floor.

HEATING

1. **Heating appliances:** Most residential fires are caused by improperly installed and maintained heating systems. These systems must be installed and maintained according to manufacturer's specifications.
2. **Chimney installation and inspection:** Venting a fireplace through a chimney used for furnaces or water heaters is prohibited. Be sure to obtain assistance from a masonry or building contractor, supplier, chimney sweep, or other knowledgeable persons when installing or inspecting chimneys and fireplaces.
3. **Kitchen ranges:** Freestanding and built-in ranges must have a vertical clearance above the cooking surface of at least 30" to combustible materials or 24" to non-combustible materials.
4. **Range hoods:** Vent-type range hoods must be vented to the outside. A one-inch minimum clearance from combustibles must be provided. Unvented range hoods may be used if listed and if installed according to listing specifications.

PLUMBING

1. **Pipes:** Pipes must be supported in enough places to prevent sagging.
2. **Freezing:** Water pipes and waste pipes should not be located outside of a building or in an exterior wall unless adequate protection against freezing is permanently provided.
3. **Water conditioners:** Care must be taken to prevent direct connection of water conditioners to building waste piping. Ask your plumbing contractor about this.
4. **Water heaters:** Water heaters must be properly vented and have pressure relief valves. Contact a licensed plumber or local building official for pressure and drainage requirements.

ELECTRICAL

1. **Adequate service:** Electrical service equipment should

be inspected by an electrician. Deteriorated or overloaded service equipment should be upgraded to a minimum of a 100-ampere service.

2. **Grounding:** Electrical service equipment must be properly grounded from the service panel to water pipes or to a grounding rod.
3. **Ground fault protection:** In new houses or additions, receptacles in bathrooms, garages, and at the exterior of the house must have ground fault protection. In existing homes this is highly recommended.
4. **Receptacles:** In new houses or additions, walls in habitable rooms or residences must have receptacles spaced so that they can be reached within six feet from anywhere along the wall without the use of an extension cord.

ENERGY

The Indiana Energy Conservation Code sets forth minimum requirements for new buildings and additions with regard to exterior envelope, heating and cooling system, water heating, electrical distribution and lighting for the efficient use of energy. Building contractors and/or officials can provide assistance in complying with this code.

GENERAL

1. **Live loads:** When converting an attic to sleeping rooms or when adding a deck or installing stairs, there are specific code requirements for adequate supports which will prevent failure. Find out in advance what these are.
2. **Safety glass:** Before installing or replacing glass, determine whether or not the window is in an area where human-impact-resistant glass is required. This is not only important for the safety of your own family, but also to prevent possible legal liability.
3. **Smoke detectors:** Law requires that all homes being built must have a permanently wired smoke detector adjacent to each sleeping area. Every home being remodeled must have a battery-operated smoke detector installed adjacent to each sleeping area.
4. **Foam plastics:** Foam plastic insulation, for all of its energy-saving value, can emit lethal gases if ignited. The code requires foam plastic insulation to be covered with a thermal barrier (e.g., 1/2" gypsum board) on the living area side. Check with your building or fire official about special requirements for attics and crawl spaces.
5. **Climatic requirements:** There are a number of snow loading, wind pressure, and frost line depth requirements for homes. If you are building or adding on to your home, find out what the codes say.

Presented By:

In Cooperation With:

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